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ABSTRACT

A practicum was developed to assist prekindergarten teachers present a whole language approach in their already developmentally appropriate classes. Six teachers from three classrooms serving 63 four- and five-year-old children participated in on-site training and weekly consultations. The teachers were all experienced paraprofessionals with Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials. The children were admitted to the prekindergarten program based on income eligibility. The teachers attended five 2-hour workshops on how young children learn about reading and writing in a whole language approach classroom. The teachers learned about the use of predictable big books and ways to provide print experiences throughout the room. An attempt was made to involve parents through a meeting on the whole language approach, a book sale, and a lending library. The final checklist of each classroom documents a large increase in print opportunities, teacher encouragement and child participation with print. Although the parent meetings were held and children's books sold, parents did not become active participants in the process. The teachers believed the parents needed more information about the program's parental expectations prior to the program's start. (Twenty-nine references, a list of questions about the whole language project, a checklist for whole language classrooms, the schedule for the teacher workshop, a children's checklist, a letter to parents, and a description of a whole language classroom are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Helping Young Children Gain in Literacy: Implementing a Whole Language Approach in Prekindergarten

by

Marjorie S. Wilson

Cluster XXXX

A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Rhea B. Mike
Rhea B. Mike

Executive Director
Title

3625 Fowler Street, Ft Myers FL 33901
Address

Feb 10, 1992
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Marjorie S. Wilson under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Aug. 31, 1992
Date of Final Approval of Report

June S. Delano
June Delano, Ph.D., Adviser

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To the ladies of Harlem Academy:

I appreciated your gracious cooperation and I enjoyed every minute of our time together.

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ABSTRACT

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In-service Training/Preschools/Head Start/Prekindergarten/ Day Care/C.D.A. Training

This practicum was developed to assist prekindergarten teachers present a whole language approach in their already developmentally appropriate class. Children in this four year old class were involved with active learning but they had few opportunities to interact with print and gain in early literacy. Six teachers from three classrooms serving 63 four and five year old children participated in the on-site training and weekly consultations. The teachers were all experienced paraprofessionals with C.D.A. credentials. The children were admitted to the prekindergarten program based on income eligibility.

The teachers attended ten hour workshop on how young children learn about reading and writing in a whole language approach classroom. The teachers learned about the use of predictable big books and ways to provide print experiences throughout the room. The writer visited the site weekly and advised the teachers and helped them equip their rooms. An attempt was made to involve parents through a meeting on the whole language approach, a book sale and lending library.

The final checklist of each classroom documented a large increase in print opportunities, teacher encouragement and child participation with print. Although the parent meetings were held and children's books sold, parents did not become active participants in the process. The teachers believed the parents needed more information about the program's parental expectations prior to the program's start.

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August 16, 1992

Marjorie S. Wilson

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The setting of this problem is a small agricultural town in the central part of the state. Approximately half the population are African-Americans living in a community separated from the remaining population by railroad tracks, a small airport and a large factory and processing plant. During the winter Caribbean migrant workers arrive to harvest the sugar cane. In recent years migrant Mexican workers also come here with their families to help pick the local vegetable crops. Some of these families are settling in the community and establishing an ever growing Hispanic population. The town's population reflects great wealth and great poverty.

The Writer's Work Setting and Role

The child care center in which the Prekindergarten Program has been established is the old segregated school in the heart of the African-American community. The child care center was created following desegregation to serve low income working families who needed child care. Today

the center serves 217 children from birth to age 12.

Two and a half years ago the state made prekindergarten intervention money available to the counties to serve the population of children who will enter school the next year. The county renovated three large rooms at the child care center for this purpose. The program is open from 8 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. Care for the children can be extended until 6 o'clock if the families have the need.

To enroll in the program children must meet eligibility requirements that include income guidelines or documented concerns that the children are at risk for abuse or neglect. Sixty-three children are currently enrolled in the program. All the children will be 5 years of age by September 1, 1992. Most children are African-American and come from single parent families. Many parents make their living working in the nearby vegetable fields but a large number are unemployed. There also are a few children from the local Mexican-American community attending the program. The migrant Mexican children are being served this year by a new special program initiated in October at the same site as the prekindergartens but in an adjoining room. Six teachers are involved in the prekindergarten program along with one Spanish speaking "floating" assistant. They all live in the community adjoining the center. Each teacher has her high school diploma and her Child Development Associate. They have an

average of 7 years of experience working in child care at this site. The teachers work in teams of two, a ratio of 1 teacher for 10 children and they are responsible for planning the program for the children in their room.

The program allows considerable latitude for the teachers to decide the activities for the children but age appropriate activity guidelines must be followed. Each day a plan is required to be posted, visible to parents and supervisors, that includes teacher initiated activities for small groups and procedures for circle times. The teachers are also instructed to post the name of the book they plan to read in story time and any new materials they are going to make available in the six learning centers furnished in each room.

The writer is the director of education for the central agency sponsoring the prekindergarten program. She usually visits the program weekly to observe in these classrooms, as well as the other rooms that serve a younger population. The length of the visit varies and is sometimes followed by a nap-time training session for the six teachers. Almost all plans and requests for changes, new equipment and materials are made with the Education Director, who shares accountability for the quality of the program.

Chapter II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Guidelines were established for the prekindergarten program based on the standards described by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, (Bredekamp, 1987). The guidelines specifically advised programs to avoid focusing on single academic subjects, isolated skills and the use of workbooks and dittos. The guidelines state that children should be involved in active learning with teacher facilitation. Emphasis should be placed on language development through conversation, experiences, story time, and dramatic play. The children in the prekindergarten program should be experiencing an active early childhood program with teachers involving them in conversation. The guidelines mention, but do not elaborate on, giving children opportunities to dictate stories and experiment with writing. The teachers in the prekindergarten program lacked specific directions for what they should implement related to literacy experiences. The children were missing many opportunities to interact with the world of

print. They were not building a firm foundation for formal reading instruction.

Originally, efforts were made by the teachers to send home books and activities related to print for the parents to share with their children. After some initial enthusiasm, the activity bags were rarely circulated and efforts to add new materials became non existent. New parents were never advised of the existence of the books and the bags, and the teachers were not making an effort to promote their use with the families.

During the course of the past year, small groups of children showed interest in writing and the teachers made pencils and paper available to them in the art area and willingly answered questions. Efforts were not made, however, to spread the interest to the entire class.

Random efforts to train the teachers in the importance and methods to facilitate early reading experiences had been made during consultation and nap time training. However, no concentrated or organized effort had ever been made with the whole group to introduce the range of activities, materials, and strategies available to them. No effort had been made to show the teachers how effective their role could be in interesting their four year olds in print without using direct instruction.

Instead of a classroom rich with opportunities to explore print, reading and writing; the prekindergarten children were receiving limited exposure and scarce

encouragement to be involved with early literacy experiences.

Problem Documentation

The extent of the problem, minimal literacy experiences for the children, became evident during observations made by the writer and her associates during the past year. At first glance, the rooms appeared conducive for children to interact with print. Each room had a language center with available books and a small writing center. There often were dictated stories and pictures with written comments made by the children hanging on the wall. Story time was a scheduled part of each day, usually just before lunch. Most of the children's shelves had some printed, as well as pictured labels to indicate where materials belonged.

Three groups of people showed evidence of the problem. First, were the children who did not seem involved in activities promoting their literacy. Their lack of literacy experiences were the concern of this report. During free choice time, the children were rarely involved with books or writing activities. Most of the writing that occurred was done by the teachers who ignored the attention of the children. On many days the children were probably involved with print for no more than ten minutes during story time if the schedule was followed.

The second group involved with the problem were the

teachers. During observations longer than a glance their contribution to the problem became more obvious. The scheduled story time was frequently missed. Children were spending extra time on the playground and the story time was sacrificed. Often, when story time was included, the teacher simply grabbed an available book and started to read without preparing the children in any way. Most teachers asked the children questions about the story as they read but these questions were likely to be simple, factual, and closed ended inquiries related to details in the story.

The language centers were observed to be one of the least used centers in each prekindergarten room. It rivaled the discovery area for lack of popularity. In two of the rooms this area was remote and children probably had limited awareness of its existence when they chose their free play activity. The books were rarely rotated in the language area and were not carefully selected to tie in to other class or community activities. In two of the rooms the writing area did not include a writing surface specifically established for this function. On several occasions the writer found the writing center covered by the teacher's personal material and unavailable for the children's use.

There was little evidence of the extension of print into the other five centers; art, dramatic play, blocks, manipulatives and discovery. Occasionally, a pretend

store was established for a few days but no use was made of store signs or shopping lists. Newspapers, cookbooks, magazines and brand name products were not visible in the house area. Children were not encouraged to make signs to accompany their block structures and there was rarely pertinent reading material in the discovery areas. Virtually no use was made of charts recording the children's observations.

The same dictated stories adorned the walls for weeks and months on end. The writer never heard the dictated stories being read to the children or the children trying to attempt to read them for themselves. The meaning of the printed words was forgotten. During one observed dictation time, the teacher was seen writing the children's comments on a small pad. During nap time the teacher copied the story on a large sheet of paper and hung it up. The children never saw the connection between their words and the print.

Although there was genuine evidence that children's comments were dictated for their art work, these comments, also, were not read back to the children. In one of the classes it was observed that the teachers preprinted children's names on papers before they handed them to the children. If a child's paper was missing a name, the teacher took the paper back and printed the child's name out of the child's sight. Teachers encouraging children to write for themselves, including writing their own name,

was rarely witnessed. This was also true of reading. Printed words were virtually never pointed out to the children. The print that existed around the room was ignored.

Each group of teachers voiced concern that their children were not being introduced to reading and writing because the teachers were not permitted to give formal instruction, drills and worksheets. One teacher indicated that she would like to have initiated a formal "phonics" program like the one that was so successful with her grandson. Another teacher spoke of her daughter's great success in learning the alphabet in the child care center she attended. A teacher was heard to tell a parent that she was not allowed to teach the children the alphabet so not to expect it. It seemed obvious to the writer that the teachers were not satisfied with their role and effectiveness in helping the children develop knowledge concerning early reading and writing but they were not making many appropriate efforts.

The final group involved in the problem were the parents. The parents were not taking the book bags and literacy related activities home. The teachers believed the vast majority of their children never visited the public library and they also doubted there were children's books in the homes. This factor made the classroom problem even more severe. The children were missing opportunities in both home and school.

Causative Analysis

There were possibly six reasons why the prekindergarten children were having limited literacy experiences during the program. All six reasons revolved around the teachers and their experiences and understandings of early literacy learning.

The teachers had little training concerning how children learn to read and write. There had been great emphasis on active, discovery and experiential learning but this had not been related to literacy.

Although the teachers attended training, some workshops and in-services, they probably had rare exposure to the professional literature concerning early childhood education. The teachers were very dependent on in-service classes for pertinent information rather than early childhood publications. No in-service had addressed early literacy.

Without training, the teachers had fallen back on their own model of learning how to read and write, formal elementary school. The kindergarten and primary children in this school district used many dittos and these were commonly considered the child's entrance point into the world of print. Phonics has become quite a popular word these days and has received a great deal of support in the media. The teachers connected phonics to formal instruction and paper work.

Most parents also retained this elementary school model for learning. A child who recited and printed the alphabet, and had a multitude of papers at the end of the day, provided a great deal of tangible evidence to the parent that schooling was occurring. The teachers were sensitive to the parents' expectations and wanted to please them. The parents were probably unaware of how important their role should be in supporting their own child's developing literacy and the teachers had not encouraged them.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature indicates that little research is being conducted related to the benefits or ill effects of early instruction related to literacy. Durkin (1984) studied young readers who acquired their skills prior to attending formal school. She found none of these early readers received any formal instruction at home although their parents supported their child 's efforts to read in a variety of other ways. The Mannings' study of their daughter's learning to read prior to formal school instruction (Manning, Manning, & Kamii, 1988), indicated their child was able to develop her own system of rules in regard to spelling and phonics. These rules became increasingly complex and realistic with time. However, when the child was introduced to formal phonics instruction, she ceased her efforts to discover, feeling the teacher was the only acceptable source of information.

Fear of failure was also a component of teachers' concerns for attempting a more holistic approach to reading. Kasten, Clarke, and Nations (1988) interviewed teachers who were interested in new approaches to literacy but felt their job was dependent on high test scores and only formal instruction could produce these.

Early formal reading instruction may not only discourage children from figuring out the process for themselves, it also may make little sense. Long (1984) states that preschoolers are usually in the preoperational stage of thinking and the conservation of rules from one situation to another is unlikely. Thus, a formal phonics program would have to rely on rote memory.

By placing emphasis on single skills such as the alphabet, children are being deprived of making the connection between meaningfulness and the symbols on the page according to McDonell and Osburn (1984). For these children beginning reading is disconnected from their experience and is very abstract. Kenneth Goodman (1986) claims such methods of instruction are not only difficult for the child but for the teacher also. Instead of starting with the foundation the child has already established, the teacher begins at an isolated point that makes the learning and teaching task more difficult. Schickedanz (1986) agrees that children need opportunities to construct their own knowledge rather than receiving formal lessons. By doing this their world begins to make

sense to them. Children exploring print will understand what they can and the information will conform precisely to their interests and level of development.

There is mounting evidence that much of the process of learning to read and write parallels the process of learning to speak (Jalongo, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Infants learn to talk by interacting with speaking people at an appropriate and meaningful level. This concept applies to much of early reading and certainly does not support formal instruction. However, it does suggest that children must have many opportunities to interact with print facilitated by interested adults.

Although teachers and parents may not perceive their prekindergarteners as readers, White-Rembert (1991) discovered the majority of preschoolers she interviewed believed they were already able to read and write. When teachers refuse to allow the children to write their own names or attempt to recite a story and declare they are really reading it, they are probably undermining the child's confidence that is so vital for later school success.

Durkin (1984) reminds people that not too many years ago parents were discouraged from involving themselves in their child's early effort to read for fear the child might get off to an improper start. Such historical attitudes certainly do not support the importance now placed on parental involvement. Guddomi, Sean, and

Bennett (1991) argue that parents need to become aware of how children learn to read and become active reading supporters of their own children in the home.

The pressure for early formal reading instruction appears to arise from several sources. David Elkind (1987) believes the major source of the problem is the parent's lack of understanding that young children learn differently than elementary school children. Because the parent's only instructional model for reading is the school, they expect to see this model implemented for their young child. Buckner (1988) also feels this impetus to early reading instruction is based on the parents' need to feel competent through the accomplishments of the child. Sava (1987) agrees and thinks the parent's best evidence of their children's advanced ability is the stack of papers brought home from the preschool. Pressure for early formal reading instruction is obviously a common problem caused by the parent's lack of information and their concern for status.

Chapter III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

The Goals and Expectations

The following goals and expected outcomes were projected for this practicum. The goals were to have the prekindergarten children interacting with print in a variety of holistic ways and in a variety of places within the classroom. It was hoped that the children would see reading and writing as meaningful, accessible and enjoyable experiences and both teachers and parents would support with understanding the early efforts of their children to become literate.

Expected Outcomes

1. The 6 teachers will have a greater understanding of what is essential in reading. When defining the word "reading", teachers will place the emphasis on deriving meaning rather than precision or pronouncement of the printed word.

2. The 6 teachers will be able to explain what young

children are learning about reading, how they are learning it and what the teacher's role is in the process. This explanation needs to include the variety of knowledge a young child is acquiring, the role of discovery and how teacher facilitation works.

3. The 6 teachers will recognize and accept their children's attitudes toward their own capabilities to read and write.
4. The 6 teachers will enrich the print opportunities in their classroom.
5. The 6 teachers will use predictable books, big books, and extending follow-up activities to promote literacy.
6. The 6 teachers will involve parents in the literacy process. Along with a parent meeting, teachers will circulate class library books and parent-child activity bags.
7. The language center will become a functional part of the classroom.
8. All 63 children will gain in knowledge about reading, writing and the function of print.

<u>Measurement of Outcomes</u>

1. Teachers' increased understanding of the essentials of reading will be measured by the 6 teachers appropriately orally defining reading in their own terms.
2. Teachers' recognition of their role in the reading

process and the children's acquisition of reading knowledge will be met if the teachers can design a simple and discriptive handout on learning to read for the parents and accurately demonstrate their ability to answer parent's questions correctly at the parent-teacher meeting. Success for this objective will be one teacher from each room contributing to the brochure and answering one parent question correctly, if asked.

3. Acceptance of the children's attitude toward their own reading and writing capabilities will be met if one teacher from each room is observed encouraging children to read and write for themselves without being corrected.
4. An increased print environment objective will be met if the writer observes at least five new print opportunities in each classroom within the first month.
5. The objective to use big books, predictable books and extenders will be met if these activities are provided at least three times a week by the end of the first month.
6. The objective to increase parent involvement in the reading process will be met if one parent from each class takes a book and a book activity bag home each night of the week after the parent teacher meeting.
7. The objective to make the language center functional

will be met if during each observation of at least 30 minutes, one child will be seen using the language area and the writing section will be equipped with a specific spot to sit, a surface on which to write, two kinds of paper from which to choose and at least 3 different writing instruments.

8. The objective to have the children gain in literacy knowledge will be met by teachers using the check list they develop during their instruction period on each of the 63 children. The checklist used during the third month of implementation should show an increased number of checks for each child compared to the first evaluation during the first month of implementation.

During the implementation of the practicum two new measurements were added to the proposed measurements because they seemed sensible and needed for better evaluation. The teachers had difficulty in clearly and concisely defining reading in objective 1. Their answers were difficult to document. A written questionnaire was developed to be answered by the co-teachers on the last day of the practicum implementation, including a question asking the teacher to define, "reading" (see Appendix A). Each classroom answered the questionnaire prior to the final meeting. The questionnaire also helped assess the teacher's understanding of their own role with the children, objectives 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7. The answers to

these pertinent questions were added to the information gained from the teachers developing the parent's reading handout and classroom observations.

To document observtions of change in the classrooms over the three month period, objectives 3, 4, 5, and 7, the writer developed a checklist of items and behaviors expected in an early childhood class supporting the whole language approach (see Appendix B). This checklist was used during the first week of the practicum and, for comparison, during the last few weeks. The checklist documented changes in teachers' attitudes toward the children 's capabilities, changes in the children's involvment in literacy activities, changes in the environment and changes in the use of big and predictable books.

Chapter IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

Children in the prekindergarten program need to be exposed to a variety of print and writing experiences that encourage exploration. These early efforts lay the foundation for later formal instruction. The children in these prekindergarten classes were missing many opportunities to build this foundation by having very limited opportunities to be involved with meaningful print. Pflaum (1986) suggests that interesting experiences, such as field trips and classroom events, increase children's interest to communicate in a variety of media including print. Planning special experiences had been a problem for the prekindergarten program in the past but this year the school board made buses available for trips. Hopefully, a variety of events have been planned. A supportive environment for literacy extends beyond equipment and experiences. Walton (1989) describes the importance of encouraging a child to make efforts without fearing criticism or mistakes. The teachers

needed to make an effort to bring about this. The preliminary observations indicated the teachers were anxious for printing to look perfect and insisted that they write names rather than the child. Kasten, Clarke, and Nations (1988) found that children involved in a whole language approach to reading and writing were very enthusiastic about books and related activities. A positive attitude toward reading and writing was a major finding of their research and an important objective of this practicum. Kasten, Clarke, and Nations' study was particularly relevant because one of the experimental prekindergartens was for economically disadvantaged African-American children, a population similar to the children in this practicum.

A holistic approach to early literacy experiences is encouraged by McDonell and Osburn (1984). Children need to focus on meaning in print rather than precision. Goodman (1986) agrees and speaks of the whole language approach as the easy way for children to begin to read; formal instruction, the difficult way.

The research on successful early reading strategies is limited. Young children are very unpredictable test takers (MacGinitie, 1984) and the teacher's personality is a serious confounding factor (Pikulski, 1984). There is some evidence that children profit from direct instruction in phonics (Samuels & Schachter, 1984; Weaver & Schonhoff, 1984) but the subjects in these studies are older than

4 years and are probably developing the ability to conserve rules.

There is mounting evidence that learning to speak has many similarities with learning to read (Glazer, 1989; Jalongo, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Language is learned by interacting with adults in meaningful conversation and learning to read and write is interacting with purposeful print in the presence of literate people (Glazer, 1984). By playing with symbols, children also are beginning to understand there are patterns underlying the symbol's use (Dyson, 1990). By age 5, many children are involved in writing by using inventive spelling (Harste & Woodward, 1989).

Besides supportive attitudes by adults, emphasis on meaning rather than precision, and available print for interaction; the literature has many specific suggestions for a rich literacy environment. Lynch (1986) suggests that predictable books and big books help young children make the connection between print and meaning. The prekindergarten teachers in this practicum had some access to such books but most of the classes had limited experience with them. Culinan, (1989) also emphasizes that children's books should be carefully chosen for quality and interest. Making thoughtful choices needed to be discussed with the staff because they had a tendency to read the nearest book at hand during story time.

Poetry adds another dimension to early reading

experiences. The shortness, rhyme and visualization make this form of print particularly effective with preschoolers (Andrews, 1988). The prekindergarteners were exposed to some fingerplays and rhymes that happen in books, but the writer never heard a teacher simply present a short poem. Along with introducing predictable books, a variety of poetry resources needed to be introduced to the teachers.

The importance of a reading and writing center was discussed by both Teale and Martinez (1988) and Laverne Warner (1991). Both articles stress that language centers should be accessible and inviting. Children need a variety of materials related to print in each area. Although the area should be intimate, it also needs to be visible in order to encourage the child's choice. The language areas in the prekindergarten classes involved in this practicum were rarely used and suggestions from the literature for enrichment were helpful.

Schickedanz (1986) suggests that print can be extended far beyond the language area. She suggests many props that can be added to the house play area that promote involvement with print. She also suggests equipping, when appropriate, the dramatic play area with a variety of props to encourage literacy expereinces that extend beyond house play; such as restaurant, post office and grocery store. Guddomi, Sean and Bennett (1991) and Mavrogens (1990) suggest one further dimension for

extending literacy experiences, involving the parents. Although there has been some efforts in the past to include the parents in reading to the children, currently these opportunities were being overlooked.

In summary, the literature describes a supportive literacy environment as being rich with a variety of print and opportunities for interaction, many different types of writing opportunities, examples of print that reflect the "real world", parental interest and teachers who encourage and accept the children's early efforts to enter the world of reading and writing. The whole language classroom is a place where all forms of communication are supported with the children throughout the day. This is the type of classroom the writer hoped to implement in the prekindergarten program.

Description and Justification for Solution Selected

To achieve the whole language program model, the prekindergarten teachers needed information about early reading, more materials to help the children interact with print and an increased involvement by the adults in facilitating the children's efforts.

The writer planned to conduct 5 two-hour classes for the six teachers (see Appendix C). The topics for the sessions were: defining the essentials of reading and writing and what young children are learning about reading and writing; ways to enhance the physical environment to support interaction with print; the role of the

prekindergarten teacher to facilitate reading and writing; how to use big books, predictable books, poetry and story extenders; involving the parents and helping them undertake a functional role with their children.

Because the teachers were experienced, the writer assumed a role of facilitator and editor of the concrete suggestions that the teachers made concerning changes and additions to their classroom. The writer ordered any needed materials that fit within the prekindergarten budget.

The writer wanted to establish a baseline of reading and writing experiences available to the children. This was done by observations and a checklist during the first week of implementation. Observations and consultation continued in each room during the three months of the practicum. Besides working with the individual classrooms, the writer met with the six teachers together to share thoughts and suggestions.

Teachers were encouraged to develop and use an early reading and writing checklist that they designed at the beginning of the practicum. Near the end of implementation they were to note on this checklist what the children in their room had learned with the new teaching strategies. This list was to help the teachers realize how effective they had become with the children. Hopefully with this realization to be motivated to continue their strategies after the practicum was

completed. The teachers did not do this because the checklist they designed proved to be too long and unwieldy.

Because part of the problem's cause was the teacher's perceptions of parental opinion and pressures to promote formal lessons, the six teachers designed a parent's meeting to explain their new strategies. Along with the meeting the teachers also designed a handout for further explanation of the prekindergarten's program for reading and writing. This handout was given to current parents and plans were made to use it with parents in the future. During the meeting with the parents, teachers described the books and activities available for parents to take home and use with their children. The books and parent activity bags were made available to the parents in the class and some system of record keeping was identified.

Report of Action Taken

During the first week of implementing a whole language approach in three prekindergarten classes, two major actions were initiated. First, each classroom was assessed on its initial status of presenting a whole language classroom for the four year olds. A checklist was used (see Appendix B). This same checklist was used at the end of the project to document the changes the teachers had made. The second action was a 10 hour class for the teachers conducted during the children's daily nap time (see Appendix C). The classes included discussions

on the meaning of reading and how children learn about reading in preschool. There group considered how and why young children may differ in their interest and capabilities with reading and writing. The teacher's role, the preparation of the environment, the types of materials available, and the parent's role were also topics. The teachers were asked to talk with the children in their class to determine the children's view of their reading and writing capabilities.

Big books and predictable books were introduced as useful tools to help young children make connections between the printed word and the meaningful spoken word. The group was very enthusiastic about these books and seemed to understand the concept immediately.

The teachers determined ways their classroom learning centers could be enhanced with print and they discussed strategies they could use to facilitate their children's learning. As part of the training, the teachers were asked to develop a checklist to measure the growth in literacy of each child during the three months. They were asked to use this checklist during the first few weeks and at the end of the project to document increases in a variety of capabilities (see Appendix D).

Teachers were invited to order items that they believed would enhance their whole language program for their children. The group discussed their various needs and made requests for such items as; Polaroid cameras,

tape players, predictable and big books, writing supplies, and book racks and tables to be used by the children for writing.

During the fifth class the teachers synthesized this new information into a handout for the parents (see Appendix E). This handout was to have two functions; to advise parents of what was happening in the class and to help teachers review the material that had just been presented during the class. The handout was a product of the teachers' efforts and the writer's advice.

Each classroom was visited weekly during the implementation of the practicum with the exception of the Christmas holiday and the week the writer was at a conference. These weekly visits were largely consultations during which time the teachers discussed their problems, asked for suggestions and pointed out their successes. The writer, in turn, assessed progress, made suggestions and assisted with purchasing materials. Time was spent rearranging furniture to encourage accessibility to the reading and writing centers. The length of these visits varied depending on need and schedules, but amounted to 18 visits during the three months. The whole group met together 8 times for training or discussion.

A parent-teacher meeting was planned to encourage parental involvement in the literacy experiences of the children. The meeting was followed by a book sale with

bargain prices. Lack of parent participation and inappropriate parental expectations were considered part of the original problem that resulted in children lacking experiences with reading and print. It was hoped the meeting would help the parents understand the teachers' strategies and entice their participation in the project.

The format of the meeting was designed by the writer with the teachers' approval (see Apendix F). The group decided to have three separate meetings and three separate book sales. Nap times were chosen as the most convenient hours for everyone concerned.

At these parent meetings teachers had an opportunity to show the parents that the children in the prekindergarten class were having many opportunities to learn about reading and writing. These topics were not being ignored in their program. At the end of the meeting and book sale, the parents were advised that each class had a lending library. Parents were encouraged to borrow books and educational material regularly.

As an outcome of the parent meetings, a field trip to the public library was planned. Not one parent indicated that they or their child had ever been there before. The field trip was planned for the final month and parents were invited. Even some of the teachers admitted this would be their first trip to the town library. During the final weeks of the practicum, different methods of assessment were implemented. The

teachers were encouraged to complete their checklists on each child. The initial checklist developed by the writer to assess implementation of a whole language classroom was used a second time to record changes in the prekindergarten classes during the three months. Finally, a written questionnaire was developed for each classroom to clarify teacher's perceptions of what they had learned and attempted and their degree of success during the three months (see Appendix A). This questionnaire was handed in at the final group meeting. At this time, the teachers and writer discussed the project. They made suggestions for improvements and some plans for the coming year.

Chapter V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The purpose of this practicum was to provide children in three prekindergarten classes with a whole language approach to early reading and writing. The teachers, the environment and the parents were to combine to present the children with many positive and natural, not contrived, experiences to interact with printed material. Such support for the children's literacy was expected to help the children gain in knowledge about reading and writing.

The first expected outcome of the practicum was teacher's would have an increased understanding of what is essential in reading. This understanding would be evidenced by the 6 teachers having the ability to define reading in their own terms stressing the importance of meaningfulness over accuracy. In spirit this objective was met, although the teachers had great difficulty in simply giving a definition of the word, "reading." Some of this was embarrassment. The definitions on the final questionnaire ranged from appropriate to apparent

confusion with the question. One pair of teachers defined reading as, "communicating through print." A second pair stated that, "reading is fundamental and children learn to read by being read to." The answer did not address the question but when asked, directly, if it is important to gain meaning from what you read, they answered, "Yes." without hesitation. The third set of co-teachers missed the meaning of the question, also. However, in the answers to other questions they talked of helping children make the connections between the spoken and printed word and finding meaning in print. However, when the teachers were asked questions about the term, "reading" they were able to discuss the importance of gaining meaning from print.

The second expected outcome of the project was the teachers' understanding of what children are learning about reading and writing and what the role of the prekindergarten teacher is. All 6 teachers contributed to the parent brochure and readily answered the pertinent questions, numbers 3, 9, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 21 (see Appendix A). Not all their answers were completely satisfactory but the major concepts were addressed by each group somewhere on their answer sheet. All three pairs of teachers appeared to have a clear understanding of their role in assisting children. They talked about reading books to the children, using big books, putting print around the room, encouraging the children in their

efforts, offering writing material and taking dictation. In responding to question 14, five things children are learning about reading and writing, all responses were satisfactory. Replies to question 20, the 10 things you have in the reading/writing area, and question 17, the five print opportunities in your class, all responses were complete and appropriate. Two out of the three responses to the purpose of big books and predictable books were pertinent and all the questionnaires had accurate responses to the question concerning the teacher's job. Questions 14, 16 and 21 related to the teachers' observations of the children's learning. When analyzed collectively the responses to these questions indicated all the teachers had observed the children learning about reading and writing. The teachers mentioned left to right writing, identifying words, knowing authors and titles, forming letters, reading their names on lists and matching pictures and words. The questions answered inappropriately by the teachers appeared to be misread or misinterpreted.

The success of this objective was further supported by the writer's many classroom observations. The 6 teachers were usually seen facilitating the children's experience with print. Because the parents asked no questions about the whole language class during the parents' meetings, the teachers did not have an opportunity to demonstrate their capability to handle

parent questions.

The third objective of this practicum addressed the need of the children to feel confident about their abilities to read and write from the very earliest emergence of this skill and their need for teacher support of their efforts. All 6 teachers reported, during the first classes, that some of their children believed in their capability to read and write. All the final teacher questionnaires reported that their 63 children believed they could read or write. During observations all teachers were observed supporting children's efforts to read and write. During any single observation, at least one of the teachers demonstrated a behavior supporting or encouraging the child's efforts to interact with print. On three occasions, a teacher told a child of a mistake or made a correction in a reading/writing effort but in each instant the teacher recognized the inappropriateness of her response and attempted to reword her comment.

If children are to interact with print there must be print in the environment. Objective 4 was to be met by a minimum of five new print opportunities being evident within the first month. Observational notes indicated this objective was rapidly met in the three classrooms. Printed poems, menus, telephone books, recipes, books on tape, teacher made books, magazines, and commercial containers were visible in all the rooms within the first couple of weeks of implementation. The teachers offered

suggestions to each other and frequently an idea would begin in one room and then would be seen in all three rooms. According to the checklist for a whole language classroom (see Appendix B) all three classrooms easily met this objective. The classroom that was initially best prepared for a whole language approach added five print elements that included books on tape, books in dramatic play, and posters to read in the reading area. The least equipped classroom made extraordinary gains with print opportunities. This room became the classroom with the most checks. The third classroom was almost as successful. Probably the weakest area relating to print opportunities in each class was selecting relevant books for the reading area. The selections in each room appeared to be random and not chosen to enhance classroom or community events.

Predictable books and big books support children's early efforts to make connections with print and its meaning. The fifth objective was to observe the use of these books in the room at least three times a week. The group of teachers were very excited by the big and predictable books they saw and read during the early training session. They were each given four predictable big books immediately and some more were added to the classrooms later. The element of predictability was also extended to familiar songs and rhymes that were written and hung on wall charts around each of the three classes.

During every weekly observation predictable big books were visible and the children indicated they were very familiar with the contents. In each room there was evidence that the children had heard the stories frequently enough to memorize them. The teachers also stated that the books were read many times each week but they were not careful to document this on their lesson plans. This objective was at least partially met because there was evidence of frequent big/predictable book use but the writer cannot state that this occurred at least 3 times a week.

Parents are an important component in a child's enjoyment of learning to read. A sixth objective in this practicum was to have parents use the classroom as a lending library on a regular basis, at least one book or literacy activity bag going home each evening. This component failed in every way except some parents purchased books for the children at the bargain book sale. Within the 6 week period, when parents were being encouraged to take books home, no more than three or four parents participated and even these parents borrowed only one or two books.

If children are to choose to read and write, there must be materials and a place for this to be done. This seventh objective would be met if there were children using the reading/writing center during every extended observation and the writing center was fully equipped with a place to sit and write, and available paper along with

writing instruments. This objective was fully met on every observation in all three classrooms and on the final checklist. The reading/writing centers were consistently busy when the writer visited and the teachers reported this to be true each day. One teacher even voiced a mild complaint that her children only choose reading and writing during free choice time out of the 16 possible checks related to equipping the reading/writing center, (see Appendix B), the lowest scoring classroom received 13 checks.

The children's increased use of the reading and writing center should be reflected in an increased understanding about reading and writing. Objective eight's achievement was to be documented by teachers recording children's growth on a checklist they developed during the first week of implementation (see Appendix D). This was not a successful indicator. The checklist was too unwieldy and one class did not use it at all. Another class put a check whenever they saw a child exhibit a skill, thus there was no evidence of time frames. In the third classroom teachers included dates but many of them preceded implementation of the project. Through observation and teacher reports, however, a multitude of gains were observed. In the last month of implementation, during longer observations, the writer always saw at least one child reciting a story while holding a book or looking at a chart. In the room with the large blackboard there

was always evidence that a child had copied a readable message printed elsewhere in the room. All the teachers reported, without hesitation, that their children gained literacy knowledge in a variety of ways. This also was documented in the staff's answers to the questionnaire filled out on the last day of the practicum. Objective eight can be described as partially met although there is no common documentation for each child.

Discussion

According to the teachers participating in this practicum the program was a success for them and for their children. The teachers felt the changes they had brought to their program and the room really had made a difference. They were impressed with how interested their children were in trying to read and write. Reading and writing were frequently a freely chosen activity by the children, not an imposed chore. Kasten, Clarke and Nations (1988) reported their prekindergarten children introduced to a whole language approach as falling in love with books. That description is applicable to many of the children in these classes.

The teachers' attitudes at the end of the program indicated they have every intention of continuing the approach. They are even talking about some of the things they may implement next year. They also have voiced their openness to more suggestions to expand the availability of print in their classrooms, especially more predictable big

books. In addition they shared a dream for some computers for the children to play with writing.

The children's increased skills reported by the teachers include: increased ability to rhyme, understanding the need to move from left to right, the meaning of the words "author" and "title", and the ability to match some pictures with words. Unfortunately the checklist was not used in a way that could clearly document the gains the children made during the period. The checklist was too detailed and time consuming for the teachers to administer. To reflect accurately and efficiently the children's growth an extremely simplified checklist needs to be designed and the pretest and posttest need to be many months apart, not only to indicate more growth but to give teachers more time to observe each child.

The teachers acknowledged their pleasure and surprise that all the children reported confidence in their own ability to read and write. The few parents at the parent meeting also agreed that their children were showing great increases in interest about reading and writing. Unfortunately, the parent component of the practicum did not extend beyond the comments. Very few parents attended the parent meetings even though many were not working and their homes are not too far away. Many parents who indicated that they would attend did not show up. The staff felt that a number of parents kept their children

home that day so they would not have to explain to the teachers why they were not at the meeting. A few parents stated they never attend anything when the soap operas are on. It is also suspected that a number of parents may not be able to read and feel threatened at a meeting addressing this topic. One parent complained that the teachers are always making demands on their time and they were not too happy about this.

Added to the parents' disinterest is the staff's resentment that many of the parents are young and are not trying to support themselves financially. Even though the staff may try not to, such feelings are apt to be conveyed subtly to the family. There is no doubt the teachers did not promote parent involvement with the same enthusiasm they supported their children's learning. There were no clear instructions for the parents on how to borrow books or evidence of the titles available. The activity bags were not resurrected. The children were not encouraged to be part of the borrowing process. Some teachers admitted the few books sent home were not returned. This bothered them and discouraged further efforts.

The failure of the parent component does not diminish the success currently observed in the classrooms. Children are enjoying print in a variety of ways. Teachers are encouraging and supporting their children's literacy experiences. But in a few months these children will be leaving this class for summer vacation and

kindergarten in the fall. The role of adult support may then rest on the parents' shoulders and elementary school teachers who supervise many more children than in the prekindergarten class. The new school also will be an environment that does not always support confidence and pleasure with reading and writing. There are grades and test scores with which to contend. Parents who lay a reading foundation for their children and show a continuing interest in their child's development are needed.

Recommendations

Because the parents were not active in this project, the first task should be to involve them. This involving process needs to begin on the day a child is enrolled in the prekindergarten. Before the program begins, the parents need to understand the program's expectations for their participation and the center must make it very easy for the parent to carry out these responsibilities. A variety of ways to support parent participation needs to be explored.

Secondly, if parents are not able to read they should be identified and helped at this time. Even if a parent is unable to read well, a child will profit from sitting with the parent and looking and talking about the pictures in a book. Parents need to know how important they are to their child's learning even if they can not read. Fortunately, a family resource coordinator has been

recently hired to assist the prekindergarten program. Family literacy is definitely one of the major concerns for the resource person. She is also responsible for helping to encourage cooperation between parents and the program. Thirdly, the teachers need constant support if they are to continue and grow in the whole language approach. This support needs to be in the form of supervision, training and new materials, especially predictable and predictable big books.

Finally, the success of this practicum is sufficient to encourage whole language efforts in the many four year old programs sponsored by the central agency that administers these prekindergarten classes. These experienced prekindergarten teachers can be models for others and their enthusiasm should be contagious.

Dissemination

The writer plans to conduct several workshops based on this practicum for child care center directors. Already there have been some requests for assistance in implementing a similar program in several prekindergarten classes. Hopefully, workshops on the whole language approach to early reading and writing will help prevent young children from experiencing programs which insist upon direct reading instruction, tedious paper and pencil exercises and piles of worthless papers sent to the parent with smiley faces each night. Children in this whole language program have generated an abundance

of evidence that of their own volition they were learning to read and write and they and their teachers enjoyed the process.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WHOLE LANGUAGE PROJECT

Questions About the Whole Language Project

1. Why is it important to write the children's dictated stories in front of them so the children can see your hand and what you are writing?

_____

2. What is wrong with children coloring dittos of individual letters of the alphabet?

_____

3. Why don't you use flash cards with letters on them and then ask the children to name the letter and say the sound the letter "makes"?

_____

4. Have all your children been to the library? _____

5. Did all your children receive books for Christmas? ____

6. How many books did you sell to parents? _____

7. Why do your parents not read to their children?

_____

8. Why do your parents not take books home?

_____

9. To make sure preschool children are receiving a good foundation in early reading and writing -Name three things you are doing now for your children? -

   1. _____

   2. _____

   3. _____

10. Can you think of a way that learning to read is like learning to speak?

_____

11. About how many of your children believe they can read and write? _____

12. How could you respond to a parent who said, "My child is not learning anything in your class because they never bring dittos home?

_____

_____

13. In a few words how would you define "reading"?

_____

14. Name five things your children are learning about reading and writing while they are in your class?

1._____ 2._____

3._____ 4._____

5._____

15. What is your job in helping children learn to read and write?

_____

16. What have you seen a child "discover" about reading and/or writing, something you did not teach the child.

_____

17. Name 5 print opportunities you have in your class.

1._____2._____3._____

4._____5._____

18. Why use predictable books?

_____

19. Why use big books?

_____

20. Name 10 things you now have in your reading and writing area?

1._____ 2._____ 3._____

4_____ 5._____ 6._____

7._____ 8._____ 9._____ 10._____

21. What have you seen your children learn about reading and writing in the past three months?

_____

22. Has a parent asked you a question about what their child was learning? What was the question and what was your answer?

_____

_____

_____

23. Can you think of one way you have extended a story after reading it several times to the children- acted the story out? -made books? -made pictures? Describe.

_____

24. What have your learned about young children learning to read and write during the past three months?

_____

_____

25. Is there anything new you would like to try with your present class or the class who will enroll next year?

_____

APPENDIX B

CHECKLIST FOR WHOLE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

CHECKLIST FOR WHOLE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Class_____

Month 1 Month 3

I. Areas

Discovery area

___Books relating to items on the discovery shelf. ___

___Evidence that records or charts have been made. ___

Art area

___Dictated comments on art work. ___

___Pencil attached to easel so children can write their own names. ___

Block area

___Paper and marker available for signs. ___

___Playdough/glue/depressors available to support sign. ___

Manipulative area

___Shelf labels use the proper name of the manipulative. ___

House area

___Commercial boxes and jars. ___

___Props for play store obvious. ___

___Books, newspapers and magazines in the sitting area. ___

___Cookbooks in the kitchen. ___

___Telephone directory by phone. ___

Writing area

___Place to sit for two or more. ___

___Surface on which to write for two or more. ___

___At least two kinds of paper. ___

___At least two kinds of writing tools. ___

___Alphabet sample. ___

___Envelopes. ___

___Pretend stamps. ___

___Card or book with pictures and words printed. ___

___Pretend mail box. ___

Reading area

___Bookshelf displaying at least six books. ___

___At least one book relative to happenings in class. ___

___Book on tape, book and player available. ___

___Area is obvious. ___

___Area is comfortable. ___

___There is a poster or other print material displayed. ___

___There are children made books. ___

II. Teachers

Story time

___Book is planned ahead of time. ___

___Predictable or big book used sometimes. ___

___Teacher talks about the book, author, illustrator etc. ___

___Before starting book for the first time, the teacher encourages the children to relate their experiences to the story. ___

___Follow-up activity, including acting out, open ended questions or having children suggest alternative plots. ___

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___More than one story time each day. ___
___Poetry used during some part of the day. ___

Transition time

Some literacy experience encouraged during a waiting time,
___such as lunch, finishing clean up or bathroom delays.___

Special projects

___Pen pals. ___
___Journals. ___
___Child made books. ___
___Trip to the library. ___
___Dictated stories (not older than one week) on the wall.___
___Predictions of what children think will happen. ___

Facilitation

___Teacher talks with children about what they are doing ___
during play time.
___Cooking day includes a printed recipe. ___
Teacher uses big book in appropriate way to help children
___make the connections between word and print. ___

When using predictable books, teacher encourages children
___to join in with responses. ___
___One small group time each week is literacy experience.___
___Teacher encourages child to write for self. ___
___Teacher encourages child to read for self. ___
___Teacher suggests using reading/writing materials. ___
___Reading/writing supplies well stocked. ___

Parents

___Books are available to go home. ___
Teachers encourage parents to take books by making the
___process obvious and inviting. ___
___Teacher encourages the circulation of activity bags. ___
Teacher has some print in Spanish available for the
___children to see. ___

Appendix C

SCHEDULE FOR TEN HOUR CLASS

Whole Language Class Schedule for Prekindergarten Teachers

Class 1: What do children learn about reading?
How do they learn it?
And what is reading anyway?

Write your definition of what reading is?

Part I.

A Case Study of Two Children: Andrew and Ann

ANDREW

Andrew was a big, relaxed baby.

He lived in a city.

He enjoyed looking at picture books from the time he was one year old.

He particularly liked to point and name items. Richard Scarry was a favorite.

At two Andrew had many words in his vocabulary but he never combined them into a sentence.

His pronunciation was almost perfect

At two years three months Andrew had an amazing spurt of language. He now spoke in well ordered sentences.

He also showed a fascination for trademarks. He could identify almost any commercial product by its trademark and he used to read the classified ads to point out trademarks.

Being read to was one of Andrew's favorite activities and he would greet company with a book to be read.

Andrew started first grade as one of the oldest children.

He was in a special class for boys. The teacher made sure the boys had a great deal of action during the day. Seat work was limited.

At Thanksgiving, during first grade Andrew could read very few words in a preprimer.

At the end of first grade, Andrew could read anything and enjoyed reading lengthy books.

He never had any problems with reading in school.
He is now a librarian.

ANN

Ann was a small fidgety baby.

She lived in a very rural setting and, due to car sickness, never could handle the hour drive to the town.
Ann had limited interest in picture books as a toddler. At nine months she learned to walk and never stopped moving.
At two Ann had a limited vocabulary and the words she did use were very unclear.

By two and a half Ann had developed great interest in story books. She loved to listen to stories about little girls. It made no difference whether the story was told or read.

Just before age three, Ann discovered the word "Boo". She loved the way it looked and pointed out this letter combination in any book she looked at.

Ann was one of the youngest children entering first grade.

Her teacher required a great deal of seat work. Children were only allowed to use the easel when all their papers were in. Ann would rush through her papers to have a chance with the paint.

At Thanksgiving Ann could read nothing in a preprimer.

At Christmas the teacher suggested Ann make an alphabet book with cut out magazine pictures. She cried every day she had to do this.

At the end of first grade, test scores indicated that Ann had made no progress in reading during the year.

Despite the lack of progress, Ann was promoted to second grade. Her new teacher was very calm, encouraging and made very small demands on Ann at any one time. At the end of second grade Ann read on a first grade level. At the end of third grade, she read at a fourth grade level. She never read for pleasure.

At 13, Ann discovered romance novels and began to read 2 or 3 a week. When Ann graduated from high school she won the English prize. She also had an English major in college.

Questions:
What was in Andrew's environment which lead to his early achievements in reading?

What was in Ann's environment which inhibited her learning to read?
What would you have done for Ann?
What finally helped Ann?

Part II

A SIMULATION

I am a little green man who has just gotten off a flying saucer. On the planet where I live, we have no such thing as reading. Ideas just travel from one brain to another on special magnetic waves. Your job is to teach me how to read. Remember, I am a fast learner but I know nothing except the fundamentals of the English language.

After this exercise, write down everything a child has to know about reading, excluding looking at a printed page and getting meaning from what he sees. Leave some space under each item. How do most children learn these things? Write your answers under each item.

Part III

How do children learn to speak? What is the adult's role. Let's make a sequential list starting with the newborn.

Now let's make a general list of how children learn about reading, starting when they are infants. What is your role as a prekindergarten teacher?

I would like to have you develop a handout for your parents, explaining how their children learn to read, how you help them and how the parents can help. We will work on a handout in a few days.

Before we leave today, will you look at your definition of reading. Do you want to change it in anyway? Tell us how you define reading now.

During the next few days try to ask each of your children if: they know how to talk? Write? Read?

Before beginning to talk about the environment, how did your children answer the question about reading.

Class II How the environment supports efforts to read and write.

Today we will look at the six learning centers and see if their are any changes, additions or subtractions we can make which will promote children's attempts to read and write.

At this minute, what are the opportunities for reading and writing in:

ART

HOUSE

TOY

BLOCKS

DISCOVERY

BOOKS

What have you seen the children doing with reading and writing?

Let's brainstorm about additions to each of these areas.

Let's visit each of your rooms right now and see how inviting the reading/writing area is. In each room let's make a suggestion list of ways the area could be made more inviting and varied.

Let's make a shopping list of items we need to create or buy.

Class III How teachers can facilitate young children's reading and writing.

How many children did you find in your class who thought they were able to read?

Can you think of why some children said, "Yes." and some said, "No."

If many of the children feel they are readers already, what are the implications for you, their teacher?

Based on your observations and thoughts you had when we were simulating the spaceman, let's draw up a list of all the things children have to learn about reading and writing. When we get this list together, you are each going to get a copy. During the next few weeks I want you to check off which abilities each child already has obtained.

Let's look at the list and talk about how you, the teacher can facilitate the child's learning. As soon as you have completed the checklist with each child, try to use these strategies. We will observe the children in a few months to see how they have progressed. Remember, this is not a test. It is a form of observation to help adults, not to evaluate the children.

Class IV: Predictable books, big books, poems and other forms of print which invite attempts at reading.

Think back to the first class. What are probably the most important factors that facilitate a young child's early attempts to read and write?

Like learning to speak, which demands frequent conversation, learning to read and write means lots of experiences with print and printing. Children need to make connections between words and print.

What is a predictable book? You know what is going to be said next in the book because it is predictable. Can you see how a child can profit and make the print-meaning connection easier. The child knows what the word says, so he/she may pay attention to how it looks in print.

Let's look through this stack of predictable books. Choose one you like and let's share it so we all feel comfortable with the term predictable.

After predictable books, let's look at big books. The more appropriate big books are also predictable. Choose one of the predictable books which you like and let me demonstrate how you might read it to the children in order to reinforce the connection between print and meaningful word. Because the book is so clumsy, it is best to find some sort of stand to hold it while you read.

Many poems have an element of predictability. Here is a collection of poems. See if you can find some predictable poems you like and then we will share them.

Another way children can make the print-word connection is through dictated stories because, presumably, the child remembers what he has said. When you take dictation encourage the child to watch your hand and listen to your voice describing what is written. Ask the child if she wants to read it back to you. Help the child spot individual words that are written.

Finally, it is important that young children see that print and reading is useful. Whenever you can, point out to the child how you need to read and write something.
What are some of the ways you read and write in front of the children other than story times?

Plan to read a predictable book for story time tomorrow.

Class V: Involving the parents

We talked about a handout for the parents in our first session.

I would like to start this session by you listing all the things you would like to tell the parents about how children learn to read and write, what you do to help the child and what the parents can do.

Let's make a list today. After a few weeks of trying some of these strategies, we can put the handout into final form. What can we do to involve the parent with reading to the child?

How can we send books home with the parent and the child. We need to revitalize our activity bag. What made people loose interest in taking these bags home? What should we put in the bags which will interest the parent and the child. Finally, let us make some preliminary arrangements for a meeting with the parents. Let's set a tentative time, agenda, place and refreshments. Do you want to involve the children? We will talk about this in greater detail in coming weeks.

APPENDIX D

Children's Checklist

Children's Checklist.
What have they learned about reading and writing?

Child's Name?_____

1. Can rhyme a simple word. _____
2. Can recognize his own name in print. _____
3. Can name most of the letters of the alphabet when seen. _____
4. Knows what the written shelf label says. _____
5. Knows the parts of the book: title, author, cover, illustrator. _____
6. Looks at books from front to back and scans the written word from left to right. _____
7. Know how to care for book and how to turn the pages one at a time. _____
8. Knows what the calendar is used for, recognizes holiday symbols on the calendar and uses the word calendar. _____
9. Can read the picture schedule using the words written under the pictures. _____
10. Can read traffic signs. _____
11. Can write their first name. _____
12. Can read some numerals. _____
13. Can write some numerals so they are recognizable. _____
14. Can write a few meaningful words that can be recognized. _____
15. Can write a 'scribble' letter with some sense of correct form. _____
16. Has memorized most of one book and does 'pretend' reading. _____
17. Can identify some song words on a chart. _____
18. Can recognize symbols on recipe. _____
19. Can write most of the letters of the alphabet. _____

20. Recognizes upper and lower case letters. _____

21. Can read the numerals up to 10. _____

22. Can read some of the daily menu. _____

23. Can do some picture/word matching. _____

24. Uses the words: newspaper, comics, magazines, telephone directories, and cookbook. _____

25. Uses the reading and writing center at least once a week. _____

26. Recognizes at least one punctuation mark. _____

27. Connects some letters with their individual sounds. _____

28. Requests to dictate their own stories. _____

29. Retells a story with some sense of sequence. _____

30. Reads common commercial words in ads or on containers. _____

31. Knows how to hold a pencil. _____

APPENDIX E

LETTER TO PARENTS

November 2, 1991

Dear Parents:

"Whole Language" is our new approach to learning about reading and writing. We are helping the children develop reading and writing skills through classroom activities. experiences and play. We are helping the children find meaning in printed words by encouraging them to make the connection between the words they **see** and the words they **hear.**

These are some examples of what we are doing with the children when we are using the "Whole Language" approach:

We read from extra big books so the children can see the printed words as well as the pictures.

We read predictable books so the children can predict the words we are going to read.

We are labeling our shelves with words so the children can see how the toy's name looks in print.

We have many different objects in the dramatic play area with commercial print labels, such as the boxes and jars in the play refrigerator. The children know what many of these labels say.

Our classroom has a reading and writing area where the children can come to look at books or "write" stories.

We are <u>not teaching</u> the children basic skills of reading and writing. This happens when the children go to the elementary school. In prekindergarten the children are learning about books, pencils, and the purpose of learning to read and write. Play is still the most important learning experience for our children.

Parents can help their children by listening to their talk and questions.
Parents can help their children by looking at books and reading to the children every day.
Parents can help their children by setting examples. Show the children how important reading and writing are to adults.

To help parents, we have classroom lending libraries. Children and parents are welcome to take books home overnight. Ask your child's teacher how this is done.

Soon we will have a parents' resource room with books, magazines and general information of interest to parents.

Your Child's Teacher

APPENDIX F

OUR WHOLE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Our Whole Language Classroom: helping 4 year olds learn about reading and writing

5 min. Have people turn to the person next to them and talk about what they do now to help their child learn about reading and writing. Can you think of anything else you might do?

10 min. Now we will tell you about some of the things we are doing to help your children learn about reading and writing. We are using a WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH. That means we think experiences in interesting conversation, getting involved in new activities and seeing new things, observing print which has meaning, hearing stories and trying to write messages are all important an important part of the background a young child needs for school.

Our room is divided into 6 learning centers. We would like to show you how your child has experiences with reading and writing and language in each of these areas.

Art area: There is a pencil attached to the easel for the children to write their name on their paper. We ask the children if they want us to write something about their picture on their paper. Many of the children like to paint letters on their paper.

House area: When children pretend play they use language, have conversations and often tell a story. We have a phone book, a cook book, magazines, newspapers and commercial products with labels so the children can see print which is meaningful to people in the real world.

Block area: Blocks are very important for children to learn about math. But their are opportunities for having conversation when children work together on a building. We have paper and pencil available if the children want to make signs for their buildings.

Discovery area: We try to keep a few interesting books in this area. We also have charts showing something about the children.

Toy area: We have the shelves well labeled so the children have a chance to practice matching objects with words.

Language area: There are books for the children to look at. They can also listen to the books on tape while they look at the words in print. We have a table where children can write messages or cards.

These are some other things **we** do to encourage your child.

1. We use **big books** with the children. This gives the children a chance to see the print while we read them stories.
2. We use **predictable books.** Children begin to memorize these books. If they are interested, they then can look at the print and know what it says.
3. We encourage the children to write and we have **writing times.**
4. We encourage the children to **dictate stories.** This helps the children see their own words in print.
5. We **read to the children twice a day.** We think this helps them enjoy the process of reading.
6. We encourage the children to **look** at all the **print** in the **room.**

What we **don't** do.

1. We do not concentrate on the children writing letters correctly. Letters all by themselves have no meaning. We want children to understand reading and writing have meaning.
2. We do not expect each child to do the same thing or learn the same things. Each child is different. They are developing in different ways and at different speeds. That is OK.
3. We are not teaching the children to read and write. We are giving them opportunities to learn.

What can the parent do? There are two things.

1. Parents can read to their children every day. We have all these books which we would be glad to lend to you and your child each night.
2. Parents can show their child how reading and writing is important in an adult's life. Tell your child why you have to read and write. If children know something is important to adults, then they want to learn it, too.

We are going to be selling inexpensive books which you can buy for your child for Christmas. If children receive books as presents, then they will know adults value them.

We are also going to have books and reading materials available in our new parent resource room. We hope you will stop by and browse when you have a chance.